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Teaching Observation Framework

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The ERO Teaching Observation Framework (TOF) is part of a suite of tools developed to support both schools and ERO evaluators to explore current conditions in a school, and the next steps for improvement. The TOF focusses on teaching and learning, enabling consistent observations of teaching practice during an ERO evaluation. The TOF also explains how resulting insights are used to inform school improvement planning through the School Improvement Framework (SIF)

About the Teaching Observation Framework (TOF)

Evidence shows that teaching practice is the largest in-school factor influencing student outcomes.
Hattie, 2023.

The purpose of the Teaching Observation Framework

The Teaching Observation Framework (TOF) is the observation framework ERO Evaluation Partners use when completing teaching observations as part of external evaluations in English-medium schools.

The TOF aims to build a shared understanding of what high quality teaching practices look like in classrooms to support capability building, improved teaching practice and, ultimately, improved outcomes for learners. In addition, the TOF ensures ERO's approach to teaching observation is transparent, consistent and well understood by all involved in an ERO evaluation.

Effective teaching practice is comprised of many inter-related elements. The TOF clearly describes what these elements look like at a classroom level to:

- Focus observations on the teaching practices that best support learner outcomes and wellbeing.
- Ensure observations of teaching practice are informed by international and national research.
- Produce insights that align to the School Improvement Framework (SIF) and school improvement planning.
- Incorporate thinking from and alignment to the School Evaluation Indicators, Tātaiako, Rongohia Te Hau, Tapasā, Ka Hikitia and key concepts from the sciences of learning.

What the evidence says about teaching observations

Teaching observations within a constructive feedback loop have been shown to improve teaching practice and effectiveness (Hattie & Timperley, 2007) and improve learning outcomes for students (Kraft et al, 2018).

Within schools, observations can inform professional learning priorities at an individual, group or school level. Undertaking observations provides valuable professional learning for both the observer and the teacher being observed, as well as opportunities for exchanging ideas and sharing practice (Hattie, 2011). Observations of this kind can be especially impactful when paired with structured feedback and reflective practice. A shared observation framework, like the TOF, can help scaffold these.

Teaching observations undertaken by more than one observer provide more reliable judgements than observations by a single observer (Ho & Kane, 2013) and mitigate any cognitive biases. Undertaking observations with more than one observer provides a more comprehensive observation, and by including school leaders in observations to share contextual information, the external observer is able to better understand what the context they are observing.

Key theories included in the TOF

The evidence-based practices in the TOF are consistent with key theories and approaches from cognitive science, educational psychology and the sciences of learning. These include:

- Vygotsky's zone of proximal development¹.
- Management of learners' cognitive load² to support working memory and development of schema in long-term memory.
- The importance of peer or social learning, especially in adolescence.
- Evidence connecting self-regulation and metacognition with learners' academic success (Mujis & Bokhove 2020, Dignath & Büttner 2008 and AERO 2023.)

Practices that support the management of learners' cognitive load are woven throughout the TOF and are indicated with an asterisk (*)

Culturally-responsive pedagogies

Culturally-responsive methods and practices for teaching (pedagogies) that connect to and reflect the numerous cultural backgrounds, experiences and existing knowledge of learners help to build learner engagement and a sense of belonging, which are vital to enable learning.

Culturally-responsive pedagogies are outlined in the [Teaching Council's Code of Professional Responsibility](#) and in [Tapasā - Cultural Competency Framework for Pacific learners](#).

Culturally-responsive practices are woven throughout the TOF and are indicated with a circumflex (^)

Further information on culturally responsive practices is coming soon.

Culturally-responsive pedagogies for Māori learners

Culturally-responsive pedagogies specific to Māori learners are included as a discrete domain in the TOF, acknowledging the unique place of tangata whenua, as stated in the Teaching Standards, and the Teaching Council resource [Tātaiako: Cultural competencies for teachers of Māori students](#).

Teaching and Learning cannot be considered 'excelling' if there is low cultural responsiveness across teaching and learning practices (TCANZ 2017, ERO SIF TL9).

Further information on culturally responsive practices for Māori learners is coming soon.

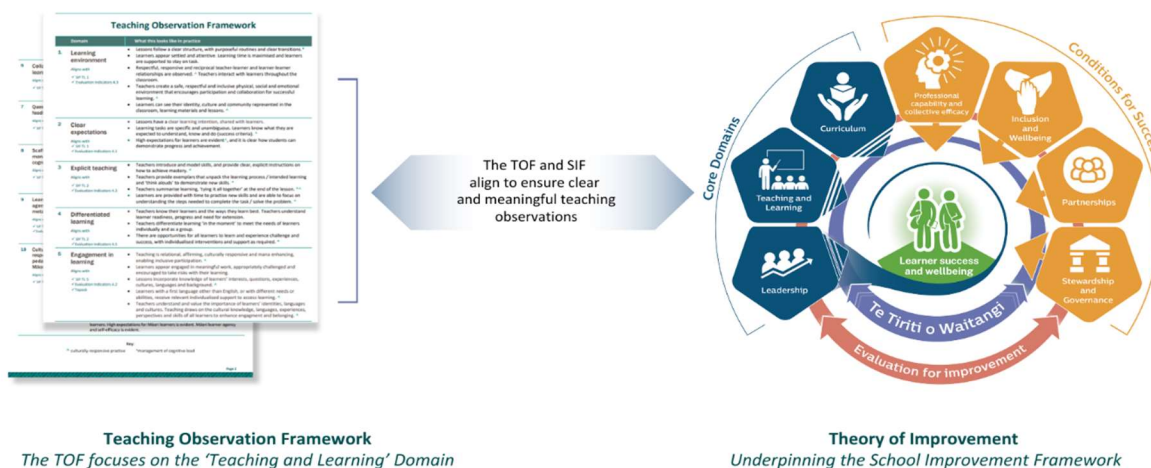
¹ Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development refers to the difference between what someone can do on their own and what they can achieve with a support or guidance, also referred to as the 'stretch zone'. Learning pitched at this level stretches a learner's abilities and grows their skills.

² Cognitive load refers to the amount of mental effort needed to process information. In the context of school and learning, it means how much information a learner can handle at one time.

How the TOF works as part of the Te Ara Huarau Evaluation

The TOF directly links to the Teaching and Learning domain of the School Improvement Framework (SIF), unpacking elements and describing what good practices look like at a classroom level. You can find more information on the SIF and how this is used as part of ERO’s approach to evaluation in English-medium schools [here](#).

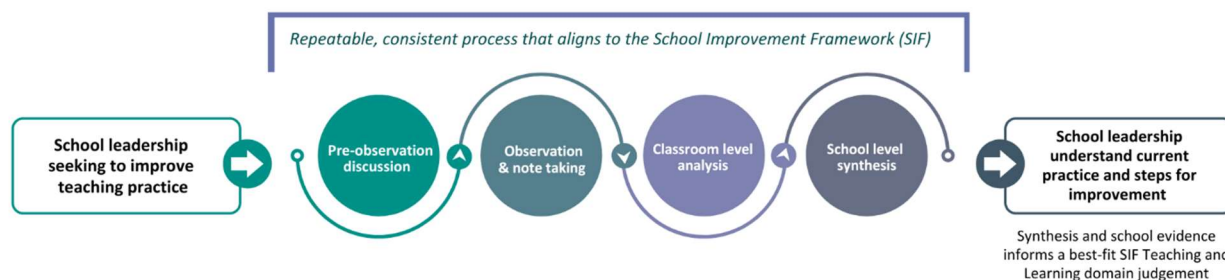
Prior to an external Te Ara Huarau evaluation by ERO, schools consider each domain of the SIF, review their evidence, and make a judgement regarding which progression best represents the school’s current circumstances. Schools provide this evidence to their Evaluation Partner who reviews, validates and verifies this evidence as part of external evaluation.



How ERO will use the TOF

ERO Evaluation Partners will use the TOF to undertake teaching observations alongside school leaders and inform discussions with school leaders regarding the Teaching and Learning domain judgements in the SIF. Observations using the TOF will validate and verify what the school knows about teaching practice across the school and act as one of the pieces of evidence in arriving at a SIF domain judgement for the Teaching and Learning domain.

Process Overview: Using The Teaching Observation Framework (TOF)



Observations one of many evidence sources

Teaching observations are just one of the evidence sources used when considering where a school is placed on the SIF's teaching and learning domain. A sample of teaching observations are undertaken and synthesised at a high level to develop a picture of teaching practice across the school.

Joint observations with school leaders

A member of the school's leadership team will join the ERO Evaluation Partner when undertaking observations. This might be the Principal, Deputy Principal, Head of Department or Curriculum Lead, depending on the size and type of school.

Having a school leader in the classroom provides contextual clarity regarding the teacher, specific students, prior and future PLD, and supports evaluation capability building through the synthesis discussions that follow. A joint observation reduces any instances of disagreement regarding what was observed, helps to mitigate cognitive bias, and enables a more thorough teaching observation.

Planning observations

As part of planning onsite evaluation work, Evaluation Partners will ask schools to plan an appropriate sample of teaching observations that represent a range of teaching practices.

Evaluation Partners will aim to observe approximately 10 per cent of teaching staff, however this will vary depending on school size, type, and context.

For example, in small or very small schools it would be appropriate to observe teaching practice in all classrooms. In a very large high school, it may be difficult to observe 10 per cent of staff during the time onsite, and a lower or more targeted sample may be negotiated.

It is recommended that observations of approximately 30 minutes, at either the beginning or the end of a lesson are arranged.

Pre-observation discussion

Prior to any teaching observations the Evaluation Partner and school leader should meet to discuss the school's teaching and learning programmes, internal teaching observation tools and evidence, recent PLD foci, and what leadership expects to see in the classroom during observations.

Observation and note taking

Both the Evaluation Partner and the school leader will take notes during each observation to capture what they see, hear and feel. This might be a running record, jottings, examples or anecdotal notes.

Classroom level analysis

Following an observation, the Evaluation Partner and school leader will together discuss what they have observed and complete the **teaching analysis template**. This might be after each observation, a series, or after all observations have been completed, depending on the school context.

The teaching analysis template includes space for both the Evaluation Partner and school leader to capture what they observed or did not observe for all teaching practices in the TOF using simple coding (including where there was not an opportunity to observe a particular teaching practice). There is also space to capture examples of excellent practice or note any differences or areas for discussion. The Evaluation Partner and school leader will discuss and arrive at a view of whether some, most or all teaching practices within a domain were observed at that time.

It is important to note that teaching observations by their nature are a snapshot in time. **It is not expected that all practices will be observable in all teaching observations.**

School level synthesis

Following a representative sample of observations, Evaluation Partners and school leaders use the **school synthesis template** to structure a discussion about what they collectively observed, how this differed from expectations, and what potential next improvement steps might be.

This is also an opportunity to pull out examples of excellent practice to share, and to identify areas of focus for future professional learning and development.

In arriving at a school-level judgement for each domain of the TOF, the Evaluation Partner and school leader will look across teaching analysis templates for all observations, and consider influences such as:

- Sample size and type – how many and different types of classrooms.
- Any differences between school expectations and what was observed.
- Areas of consistency across observations.
- Any areas of inconsistency.
- Any ‘outlier’ data and the context of these.

In general, if good practices are not consistently observed across multiple observations, it would be difficult to evidence an overall judgement of ‘excelling’.

Practices not observed

A practice that was not able to be observed during a point-in-time observation should not be taken as evidence that this practice is absent. Instead, evidence should be triangulated and validated, considering other sources of evidence such as the school’s own observation data.

There are also key elements of teaching and learning that precede and inform what happens in the classroom. It may be hard to observe these during a sample of teaching observations, as they are more reflective of the things that teachers and leaders do to support classroom practice, such as planning and assessment.

Opportunities to capture evidence of these may be difficult in a sample of teaching observations, therefore **they are not included in the TOF:**

- TL6: Supporting parents and whānau to engage in learning
- TL7: Assessment for adaptive teaching
- TL8: Effective additional supports.

These elements will still need to be evidenced as part of the SIF.

Point-in-time teaching observations

It’s important to acknowledge that a sample of brief teaching observations, while an important source of evidence, remains a limited point-in-time snapshot of teaching practice. By undertaking observations jointly with school leaders and referring to the TOF, Evaluation Partners can arrive at a view of teaching at a classroom level, which when synthesised up to a school level and triangulated against other sources of evidence is able to provide a useful picture of the consistency of good teaching practice across the school.

Observing practice for at risk learners

It is important to note when good practices are evident for the majority of the class **but not evident for the most at risk students**. For example, when the students that require the most support are given ‘busy work’ rather than a meaningful learning task. This needs to be documented on the teaching analysis template and discussed with the school leader after the observation.

ERO will not be using the TOF as a performance tool. Schools may wish to adapt domains in the TOF to include in their suite of resources to support teacher performance and development.

How schools can use the TOF

Observations have long been a part of teacher learning and development and are a key aspect of building professional capability and collective efficacy and improving teaching practice.

Schools that are part of the Te Ara Huarau Evaluation approach will use the TOF alongside Evaluation Partners as part of the evaluation team. However, schools may choose to use the TOF outside of their work with ERO, for example as part of internal cycles of teaching observations, or to support school-wide discussions regarding current practice, improvements needed and to inform PLD requirements

A school level view of teaching practices provides valuable evidence for school leaders and boards, aligned to strategic improvement priorities. Observation data can also be used to evidence several of the elements described in the SIF's professional capability and collective efficacy domain, in particular collective approaches to improving teaching practice (PCCE3).

During ERO evaluations both the Evaluation Partner and school leader will use the TOF. This allows us to have a consistent approach across the country and enables a system view of teaching practice.

Schools can use their own observation tools for internal observations.

If a school does not have its own teaching observation tool, schools may use the TOF for internal use.

Teaching Observation Framework

Domain	What this looks like in practice
1. Learning environment <i>Aligns with</i> ✓ SIF TL 1 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons follow a clear structure, with purposeful routines and clear transitions.* • Learners appear settled and attentive. Learning time is maximised and learners are supported to stay on task. • Respectful, responsive and reciprocal teacher-learner and learner-learner relationships are observed. ^ Teachers interact with learners throughout the classroom. • Teachers create a safe, respectful and inclusive physical, social and emotional environment that encourages participation and collaboration for successful learning. ^ • Learners can see their identity, culture and community represented in the classroom, learning materials and lessons. ^
2. Clear expectations <i>Aligns with</i> ✓ SIF TL 1 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lessons have a clear learning intention, shared with learners. • Learning tasks are specific and unambiguous. Learners know what they are expected to understand, know and do (success criteria). * • High expectations for learners are evident^, and it is clear how students can demonstrate progress and achievement.
3. Explicit teaching <i>Aligns with</i> ✓ SIF TL 2 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers introduce and model skills, and provide clear, explicit instructions on how to achieve mastery. * • Teachers provide exemplars that unpack the learning process / intended learning and 'think alouds' to demonstrate new skills. * • Teachers summarise learning, 'tying it all together' at the end of the lesson. *^ • Learners are provided with time to practise new skills and are able to focus on understanding the steps needed to complete the task / solve the problem. *
4. Differentiated learning <i>Aligns with</i> ✓ SIF TL 2 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers know their learners and the ways they learn best. Teachers understand learner readiness, progress and need for extension. • Teachers differentiate learning 'in the moment' to meet the needs of learners individually and as a group. • There are opportunities for all learners to learn and experience challenge and success, with individualised interventions and support as required. *
5. Engagement in learning <i>Aligns with</i> ✓ SIF TL 5 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.2 ✓ Tapasā	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching is relational, affirming, culturally responsive and mana enhancing, enabling inclusive participation. ^ • Learners appear engaged in meaningful work, appropriately challenged and encouraged to take risks with their learning. • Lessons incorporate knowledge of learners' interests, questions, experiences, cultures, languages and background. ^ • Learners with a first language other than English, or with different needs or abilities, receive relevant individualised support to access learning. ^ • Teachers understand and value the importance of learners' identities, languages and cultures. Teaching draws on the cultural knowledge, languages, experiences, perspectives and skills of all learners to enhance engagement and belonging. ^

6	Collaborative learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities for student-led collaborative learning, including peer, small group and mixed ability grouping. [^] • All learners participate in meaningful tasks and know what they are doing / their role in a group. [^] • Teaching encourages inquiry, active learning, problem-solving, collaboration and dialogue. [^]
	Aligns with ✓ SIF TL 2	
7	Questioning & feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning is open and improvement focused, used to check for understanding, stimulate thinking and discussion, and to focus attention. ^{*^} • Feedback is specific, timely, strengths-based and interactive. Learners are encouraged to reflect on their learning and progress. [^] • Formal and informal feedback provides opportunities for immediate correction and improvement, and emphasises opportunities to learn and self/ peer assess (formative) ^{^*} as well as to reflect on mastery (summative). [^]
	Aligns with ✓ SIF TL 5	
8	Scaffolding, managing cognitive load	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching is intentionally sequenced and connects to / builds upon previous knowledge and learning. ^{*^} • Learners are provided with individualised scaffolding, teaching responds to learner interests, questions and insights. ^{^*} • Learners receive multiple exposures to new skills / knowledge and numerous opportunities to practise, demonstrate understanding and apply new learning. ^{^*} • Teachers help learners to see continuity of learning over time and growing capability, and consider learners' cognitive load when introducing new concepts. [*]
	Aligns with ✓ SIF TL 3	
9	Learner agency & metacognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching helps build learner agency and self-efficacy[^], supporting learners to talk about how they learn best, [^] and consciously build learners' self-regulation, goal setting, motivation and study skills. • Teaching fosters learner beliefs in their own capabilities to learn successfully and consider how to best approach learning tasks / solve problems. • Learners can talk about how they learn best[^] and have opportunities to plan, monitor and evaluate their own progress and comprehension through self-reflection and classroom discussion.
	Aligns with ✓ SIF TL 4 ✓ Evaluation Indicators 4.3	
10	Culturally-responsive pedagogies for Māori learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers know and specifically support the aspirations of Māori learners to achieve educational success as Māori. Cultural competencies of Tātaiako can be observed in teaching practice. [^] • Whanaungatanga Teachers actively engage in respectful working relationships with Māori learners. Invitational, respectful, reciprocal relationships with Māori learners is evident. • Maanaakitanga Teachers show integrity, sincerity and respect towards Māori beliefs, language and culture. Te reo Māori and tikanga Māori is visible and normalised by the teacher and learners. • Tangata Whenuatanga Teaching affirms Māori learners as Māori and provides contexts for learning where the language, identity and culture of Māori learners and their whānau is affirmed. Relevant curriculum connections are made to the environment, local marae, te ao Māori and mātauranga Māori. • Ako Teachers take responsibility for their own learning and that of Māori learners. High expectations for Māori learners is evident. Māori learner agency and self-efficacy is evident.
	Aligns with ✓ SIF TL 9	

Key:

[^] culturally-responsive practice ^{*}management of cognitive load



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